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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the presence of community voice in a newly structured inner-city elementary school in Santa Ana (California). Nearly every family at Pio Pico Elementary School lives below the poverty level, and Spanish is the primary language of 90% of the residents, with most families being of Mexican or Central American origin. However, from its inception as a model demonstration school, Pio Pico has been a school in the cutting edge of educational reform. This study shows what makes Pio Pico a success. The school, which opened as a restructuring school, is a demonstration school for the district's bilingual education program, and is a Professional Development School in collaboration with the University of California, Irvine. The school gives voice to its community largely because of the efforts of the principal; a woman who is committed to the community and to the acceptance of the diversity of the students and awareness of their cultural heritages. The full-inclusion school serves about 900 students on a year-round schedule of 4 cycles, with 13 teachers per cycle. Parent participation is very high at Pio Pico, where parental concerns receive constant attention. The school has sponsored neighborhood cleanups to combat drug and gang activity. Community voice is strengthened by collaborative partnerships with many organizations, but it is the democratic leadership of the principal that is the key to the school's success. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

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PIO PICO:

BREAKING THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

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A Process to Understanding

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Pio Pico Elementary School - Santa Ana, California

Friday, April 4, 1997 - Observation **8:15 - 10:00 am**
***Rhubarb Jam* (theatrical performance)**

As I round the corner onto Highland Street on my way to Pio Pico Elementary School in Santa Ana, I realize I'm home. I grew up like this - only the barrio in Santa Ana and the time have changed. Old, small homes and tired apartment buildings dot the landscape of this small barrio where approximately 26,000 children and youth reside within the square mile of the Pico-Lowell neighborhood. Laundry is hung from clotheslines to dry, flapping gently in the mild breeze. I hear tejano and mariachi music emanating from different directions, competing yet blending together in the breezy air. From somewhere I hear a rooster keeping rhythm with its *cu-cu-cu-cu-roo* (Spanish for cock-a-doodle-do). There is no mistake from the heady smell wafting through the air that *frijoles* have already started cooking in preparation for the evening dinner. There is a flurry of activity - cars drive up and down the street, residents are busy washing cars, hanging clothes out to dry, tending lawns and gardens, sweeping porches and sidewalks. Yet, this neighborhood appears to be lost in another time. Maybe it's my nostalgia, but I think it has more to do with the simplicity and the economic status which define the lives of the Pico-Lowell residents.

I park my car next to a curb and a sign pronouncing a 24 minute limit. I sit for just a moment taking it all in, wondrous at the instant change I found by leaving my own neighborhood in north Santa Ana and crossing just one major street. How perfect an example this is of "the other side of the tracks."

As I walk toward the school, I meet up with mothers of all ages, grandmothers, and occasional fathers. Some are leaving, having just walked their little ones to school. Others linger at the entrance to the school, talking among themselves. This is not a car-pool community, no kids spilling out of large Suburban wagons. I imagine the scene will repeat itself again later in the day as school is dismissed and I think to myself that it would be a good time to catch a glimpse and some fond memories of the grandmothers sporting those well-known apron-dresses. It seems to be a standard uniform among grandmothers, particularly the *abuelas* in this neighborhood.

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I entered the main office where I announced my arrival. The Office Manager, Frances McKeun, escorted me to the school auditorium where I joined 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students (about 125 total) in a presentation of *Rhubarb Jam*, a children's play sponsored by the South Coast Repertory. The students sat cross-legged on the floor of the auditorium, their teachers standing strategically nearby to maintain order. As the play opened, the students sat in silence for only a few minutes before breaking out in joyous peals of laughter as the characters, dressed in exaggerated costumes and makeup, presented a play whose underlying theme was peace building. I wasn't quite sure if the event depicted in the play - a misunderstanding between two school-aged children over a rhubarb jam sandwich - was too advanced for the Pico children. But then I saw students nodding their heads, clapping, laughing, all the while signaling their understanding of what was going on.

Toward the end of the play many of the children stood up to stretch and simply walked to the back of the room close to where I was sitting and just stood. They were very polite and quiet, being careful not to disturb anyone's view. I was surprised (I guess from being at a high school for so long) by the freedom that the teachers gave their students in moving around. I did not see any students abusing this privilege. I witnessed teachers hugging students, both boys and girls, with displays of affection and encouragement.

Principal Judy Magsaysay entered the auditorium through the back door and welcomed me with a hug. She mentioned that students had been working with the educational materials provided by the South Coast Repertory specifically to prepare for the viewing of the play. When the play

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concluded, the children sat while Judy reviewed the important points of the play by asking them what they learned and how they could build peace in their classrooms, in their school, in their community and the world.

When the play concluded, I said my good-byes feeling refreshed. I got in my car and as I made a slow U-turn, *don* Medrano, the neighborhood padrino and *metiche positivo** waved goodbye to me. He was watering his lawn by hand with obvious pride for the house he painted purple to demonstrate a solidarity with the neighboring purple-trimmed Boys' & Girls' Club.

NOTE: The names of geographic locations, institutions, and individuals **HAVE NOT** been changed in any way. Permission was granted by all involved to preserve their true identities in order to situate readers within an authentic context.

This term was coined by the Pico-Lowell community to characterize those members who are positive busy-bodies, concerned with the welfare of the entire community and who go to great lengths to protect its members. Mr. Medrano has lived in the community for generations and is considered the neighborhood elder. His purple house is next door to the Boys and Girls Club and directly across the street from Pio Pico Elementary School.

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PIO PICO: BREAKING THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

Introduction

According to the media, American education is experiencing a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Educators at all levels are suspect and thus blamed by the general public for society's shortcomings. It is true that education isn't what it used to be...why should it?! After all, the atrocities so graphically detailed by McLaren (1995) that have shaped what he refers to as "social ugliness" (p. 4) have permanently scarred society. As a microcosm of society, schools are thus implicated for society's failures. Furthermore, the public places much of the blame on urban schools as producers of the *predatory culture* of which McLaren speaks.

Mirón (1996), in his assertion that urban schooling is socially constructed, states the problem so clearly: "...the proportionally small amount of social and educational problems in urban versus suburban milieus - which are largely confined to inner, central city -located schools and neighborhoods attached to public housing developments - is now taken for the common-sense understanding of the failures and misery of all (or most) urban schools" (p. 17).

Urban schools, because of their high minority enrollments and lower socioeconomic status, are generally perceived by the public as breeding grounds for academic failure, social decay, moral turpitude, gangs, drugs, graffiti, and all of society's other ills. We who are in the day-to-day business of schooling the nation's youth know differently. Unfortunately, the successes and victories we are familiar with are overshadowed by "the crisis." Few of these successes are made public.

Having been exposed to the power of critical theory and reflection early on in this doctoral program, I find myself constantly questioning whether these practices will ever become "usual and customary" in urban school settings. There is evidence that these practices exist in isolated situations as Mike Rose and others described at a recent UCLA conference on research and practice. I also know that I was a practitioner of sorts of critical theory, as were some of my colleagues, but we didn't know it at the time; that is, we didn't know the definition of what it was we were doing. Thus, I pose a broader question: Is the absence of critical literacy and reflection a

manifestation of large urban societies? Other questions come to the fore: Are urban schools socially constructed so that we unconsciously omit critical and reflective practices? Are we victims of the public's perception that as centers of learning and transmitters of knowledge we are dysfunctional, and thereby fulfilling their prophecy?

All of these questions and many others led me to undertake fieldwork at Pio Pico Elementary School in Santa Ana. The development of this paper came about after revisiting two particular readings: Bob Peterson's *La Escuela Fratney: A Journey Toward Democracy* (1995), *and Struggling for Power and Voice: A High School Experience* (1995) by Bill Terrazas, Jr. These articles are examples of attempting to move critical theory and pedagogical practices into schools and classrooms. As a public, we are led to believe that critical pedagogy is absent from the urban milieu. Such a view is primarily attributed to the media's portrayal of schools and students in urban settings as dysfunctional.

My overriding purpose was to observe the **presence**, not the absence, of ***voice*** in a newly structured inner-city, urban elementary school. Paulo Freire (1973), described his educational philosophy as "...the practice of liberty because it frees the educator no less than the educatees from the twin thraldom of silence and monologue" (pp. viii-ix). Pio Pico stands as a model for liberating voice by working to break the many cycles underlying the culture of silence to which its community has become accustomed.

<u>La Voz</u>

> *Voice* simply refers to people's authentic self-expression, with an understanding that people are situated in personal histories of engagement with their surroundings and communities through which voice is shaped by class, cultural, racial, and gender identities. Finding one's/using one's voice refers to a quality of authenticity, that one is speaking with integrity and from a position of self-empowerment, or even liberation (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996, p. 344).

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My grandfather always said, "Cada cosa en este mundo tiene voz, virtud, e idioma."[1] But, in reality he lamented that our voices (referring to poor Mexican campesinos) were suppressed, thereby making us *los desaparecidos* - missing from the mainstream. There is a vast body of literature that supports this feeling of invisibility among students, especially minorities, the economically disadvantaged, women, gays/lesbians, immigrants, etc. (Delpit, 1993; Fine, 1993; McLaren, 1995). Indeed, one of the most prevalent complaints of oppressed groups is their inability to be expressive. Voice is but one element of the transformative power of critical pedagogy. My observations centered around the following questions: How is voice espoused as well as practiced at Pio Pico? Can it be seen as well as heard? Can it be touched and felt? Is it filled with conviction or defeat? How did it get there and where did it come from? Can it be sustained?

An Urban Nightmare

It is important to provide an overview of Pio Pico Elementary School in order to develop a context from which one can gain a better understanding of the significance of its culture and its voice.

Named after the last governor of Mexican California, Pio Pico is located in the middle of the highest concentration of youth in California and the second highest in the nation. It is reported that approximately 26,000 children and youth under 18 years of age live within one square mile of the school and neighboring Boys' and Girls' Club. Nearly every family in the Pio Pico service area lives below poverty level. Many of the adults have had fewer than six years of formal education and multiple families reside together in overcrowded apartment dwellings. In most households, both parents work, usually for less than minimum wage. Spanish is the primary language of 90% of the residents in this port-of-entry neighborhood populated primarily by

[1] "Everything in this world has voice, virtue, and language."

families from México and Central America[2]. These families live in one of the poorest, most densely populated neighborhoods in one of the richest counties in California. At one time, Highland Street, on which Pio Pico is located, was ruled by gangs, and drugs could be purchased 24 hours a day (Lubetkin, 1996). As if this weren't bleak enough, the school is situated within a mile of the city's newest, state-of-the-art jail facility, one which undoubtedly offers its inmates a safer, cleaner, and in many cases, more comfortable environment than that of the residents of the Pio Pico community.

Imagine sending your child to *that* school! The odds for students to be successful appear overwhelmingly against their favor. The harsh environment described contrasts sharply with the school's mascot - la paloma de la paz; the dove of peace. It does not appear to be one where teachers and students can flourish in a critical and reflective manner. It seems less inviting for parents and community members. The students served by the Santa Ana Unified School District consistently post among the lowest standardized test scores in reading and mathematics in the entire county. From the perspective of someone on the outside looking in, especially when that someone is unfamiliar with the community, the prospects for Pio Pico's students look bleak.

Pio Pico - An Urban Jewel

We are all familiar with things that appear to be something they are not. This is especially common in the educational arena where programs or schools are publicized as state-of-the-art, innovative, progressive, magnet, fundamental, etc. Many such programs grapple constantly with their (usually) imposed identities, sometimes finding it difficult to maintain the reputation for which they are known. Given its geographic location and attendant problems, Pio Pico is more than it appears to be. From its inception as a model demonstration school, Pio Pico has been able to exceed its reputation as a school on the cutting edge of educational reform. Certainly there are areas in which the school must improve, but by and large Pio Pico is about success.

[2] During the time that our fieldwork was conducted, of the approximately 900 students, one was African-American and one was white. Today, the student population at Pio Pico is 100% Latino.

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Pio Pico is a "newly structured" elementary school in the City of Santa Ana, in Orange County, California. It is structured along the lines of what Maxcy (1995) refers to as "the new school order...transformed into postmodern social spaces in which aesthetic discourse may be jointly engaged" (p. 175). The school opened as a restructuring school under SB 1274 during the 1991-92 school year with 330 students and nine teachers. Senate Bill 1274, "A Demonstration of Restructuring in Public Education" was created to increase the capacity of schools and districts to ensure powerful learning for every student over a five year funding period. Additionally, Pio Pico was designated a demonstration school for the Santa Ana Unified School District's bilingual program and a Professional Development School in collaboration with the University of California, Irvine.

Despite daunting odds, in May 1997, Pio Pico Elementary was recognized by the State Department of Education as a California Distinguished School! Even before this recognition, there has been, and continues to be, talk around town - in homes, in community meetings, in UCI educational programs, in the media - that Pio Pico is unique. Indeed, by most accounts, Pio Pico epitomizes the "embryonic and miniature community; a free and open institution" advocated by John Dewey (in Maxcy, 1995, p. 61).

What makes this school so special and so successful? The measure of success in this case is not about standardized test scores. At some point it would be wise to examine such data. But my present focus transcends a quantitative perspective. It extends beyond the voice of individual students to the collective voice. This voice captures the essence of the school's *cultural democracy*. Maxcy (1995) attributes the following philosophical belief about education to Bode H. Bode, who authored an essay entitled *Ends and Means in Education, or the Conflicts in our Cultural Heritage* in 1939: "The primary aim of education is to set intelligence free." I truly believe that the act of setting intelligence free is manifested in the presence of voice and vice-versa.

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HOW IS VOICE ESPOUSED AS WELL AS PRACTICED AT PIO PICO?

Over a six month period (January through June, 1997), my doctoral peers and I employed qualitative research methods to observe the Pio Pico community. Data were collected through structured as well as unstructured interviews, classroom and school observations, attendance at school and community activities, and document analysis. By examining various narratives, both real and perceived, as well as icons and rituals (for example the beginning and ending of a school day), I was able to answer many important questions: Can voice be seen as well as heard? Can it be touched and felt? Is it filled with conviction or defeat? How did it get there and where did it come from? Can it be sustained? These questions are not independent of each other and thus cannot be examined separately. I will leave it to the reader to determine if voice can be seen, heard, touched or felt. But before I tackle these questions, I must emphasize again that I wasn't looking at a singular voice; for example, student voice. I was looking at the *collective* voice of the entire school community. The power of this type of collective agency is best described through Cornel West's vision of collectivity:

> ...as with a soloist in a jazz quartet, quintet, or band, individuality is promoted in order to sustain and increase the creative tension of the group - a tension that yields higher levels of performance to achieve the aim of the collective project (*Race Matters*, 1993).

West captures the essence of individuals working collectively toward a common goal while maintaining the uniqueness of each individual. As in the case of Pio Pico, the tension and creativity constructed individually, but brought about collectively, serve as an oppositional force to the reproduction of traditional, positivistic schooling practices. The honored individual-collective identity celebrated at Pio Pico creates *dreams of possibility* which are central to the postmodern school (McLaren, 1995, p. 84).

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Where it Comes From

The roots of Pio Pico's voice grew out of the appointment of a young, bright, articulate, enthusiastic, compassionate and charming woman - Judy Magsaysay - as principal of Pio Pico. To this day, Judy insists that the superintendent who appointed her took a great risk in designating her to be the one to open Pio Pico. Since there was no school to restructure, together they agreed that Pio Pico would be a "newly structured school" that would develop a rich, thinking, and meaning-centered curriculum (TMCC). The district continues to support the school's philosophy wholeheartedly.

Judy and nine teachers "opened" Pio Pico in 1991 with six bungalows at another school (Martin Elementary) drawing 330 students from the Martin campus. During the 1992-93 school year, the school moved to 13 bungalows on Highland and Flower Streets (its present location) and added an additional teacher. Four new classes were added during the 1994-95 school year (540 students) and bungalows from the adjacent Lowell Elementary School campus were also used. After spending approximately three and a half years in bungalows, the Pio Pico students and staff finally moved into their new building in 1995-96. Today the full-inclusion school serves approximately 900 K-5 students on a year round schedule comprised of 4 cycles, thirteen teachers per cycle. Of the 38 teachers, approximately one-third graduated from Santa Ana Unified School District high schools and have returned to their community to teach.

The rapid growth and change of Pio Pico necessitated that the vision of the newly structured school be embraced by the entire community. The following is a brief excerpt of an interview with Judy.

JoAnn Judy, I perceive a strong sense of voice in this school community. What makes Pio Pico so unique?

Judy Pio Pico was designated as a demonstration site for Spanish language arts and as a professional development school with UC Irvine. At the time UCI was in the process of restructuring its Teacher Education Program. Our previous superintendent facilitated the creation of a newly structured school as opposed to a restructured school. This support enabled us to hire faculty and staff aligned with similar goals, ideas, and philosophies.

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> Our teaching staff was selected with the help of parents. We were most interested in strong individuals interested in working collaboratively and within a thinking, meaning-centered curricular framework with an emphasis on interdisciplinary studies. Our school is aligned with Paulo Freire's philosophy of constructing meaningful learning within students' contexts. After lengthy dialogue and input from the community at large, we developed a mission to which we have dedicated ourselves:
>
> *To develop lifelong thinkers and learners who are eager and well-prepared to make positive contributions in a diverse global community.*
>
> Collaboration with various agencies is the centerpiece of Pio Pico's program. We planted the seeds of our collaborative planning model early on. For example, our collaboration with UCI has produced substantial benefits for both organizations. Student teachers from UCI were able to join our instructional planning teams and assist with the development of our Thinking, Meaning-Centered Curriculum (TMCC). We try to build a symbiotic relationship with our partners.

Of course, one could argue that the above is an example of espoused voice. How it is practiced is obvious in a number of ways, and all of these ways are tied to the school's leadership, that is, to Judy's distinct leadership style. In the following pages, I will attempt to show, not so much as tell, how students, faculty, staff, parents, and the community have worked collectively to create an environment where voice can be nurtured and heard without fear of repercussion.

Faculty Voice

Recently, Pio Pico's assistant principal was named to open a new elementary school within the district. Since the new school was due to open in July 1997, it was necessary for the assistant principal to leave before ending the school year. One of Pio Pico's first grade male teachers, Gary Brooks, had expressed an interest in being considered as an interim assistant principal. In a typical gesture of allowing faculty to share voice and governance at Pio Pico, Judy personally spoke to each teacher about the appointment of an interim assistant principal providing them with the names of all outside candidates as well. The faculty consensus was to give the first grade teacher a chance at the position regardless of any reservations. Judy stood by the faculty's decision. The following conversation with the interim assistant principal illustrates voice being practiced:

JoAnn Congratulations, Gary! I hear that your students really miss you in the classroom.

Gary — I also miss them tremendously, but now they get to see me in a different role, and they know I'm still their teacher. They're proud of me.

JoAnn — I heard that Judy went around to all teachers and asked what they thought about you filling in as interim assistant principal...well, she told me personally.

Gary — I heard that too and I know it's true because my peers (teachers) have been congratulating me and giving me all kinds of positive strokes. It's really validating.

JoAnn — What's it all about, I mean, what does all this mean, that they would do this?

Gary — To me it means two things, and the second one is kind of scary. First of all, the entire staff had a voice in who would be appointed to this position. That empowers everyone and it has a domino effect.

JoAnn — What do you mean?

Gary — Well, when those teachers feel they were able to participate freely in choosing me and then they supported me as a choice, I feel empowered. Judy is empowered because she lets them in on all decision making matters. She's been very supportive of me. People that aren't here don't believe this happens and that's the part that scares me. I mean do you think this is a regular practice at all elementary schools? Come on, JoAnn, you've been in this district long enough to know that there are very few, if any, principals like Judy. I'm now on some kind of assistant principal list, and if I am considered for a position, there's a strong chance I'll be moved from here. I fear that I would threaten a principal if I practice what I've learned here at Pio Pico under Judy. They can't handle giving up the power.

This conversation confirmed another transaction I had a week earlier - an interview with Frances McKeun, the office manager. She is an example of a classified employee that is just as qualified and competent (if not more) than many certificated employees. Frances stated that Judy really does believe in giving the faculty a voice. "You know, JoAnn, there's been a lot of times when the staff has approached Judy about doing something that she has been totally against. And she'll even tell them she doesn't agree, but if it's what they want, she lets them do it. Then you know how she gets - all hyper. She'll come and tell me that they're wrong and it's not gonna work. But from the minute she let's them have their voice, whether she agrees with them or not, she stands by them. She doesn't take it personally and hold grudges against anyone. She accepts it and just lets it go." I asked, "So what happens if it doesn't work, you know, what they want to do that she might not agree with?" Frances replied, "That's never happened."

During my frequent visits I have observed an aura about the campus that resonates with respect and caring at all levels. Certainly, the elementary level lends itself to such an atmosphere. But with so many strong personalities, teachers-of-the year, as well as veteran and novice teachers, how is such an environment created? How are decisions made? How is communication facilitated? I found the answers surprisingly simple. Surprising because such issues tend to be problematic in most organizations. However, the depth of the issues at Pio Pico are not minimized because of the ease in which they are addressed.

As I observed members of the Pio Pico community being in relation with one other, I inquired about communication processes, the bedrock of successful relationships. It was explained to me that in the school's second year, faculty developed a plan that would allow them to meet in grade level planning teams every Wednesday during school time. Their plan called for teachers to extend the school day by adding instructional minutes. On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, students attend school from 7:54 am to 2:30 pm. On Wednesdays they are released at 1:15 pm, thus allowing the faculty to work together. Every other Wednesday is set aside for a collective staff meeting. When this plan was presented to the district and the board of education, union officials scoffed. The district itself sent an administrator to Pio Pico to ascertain whether this was really the pleasure of the faculty or whether Judy had imposed the plan on them. The district representative found that there was a 100% commitment to this faculty-developed plan. The plan was approved and the practice has become institutionalized. New teachers are made aware of the practice during the application and interview process and are committed to it before they are hired.

An extension of voice is the school's open-door policy. In many cases such policies are in place but overshadowed by tacit understandings that only certain people have entrée to the open door. At Pio Pico, one cannot sit in the principal's office in a meeting without someone dropping in - be it students, parents, community members, district officials or teachers. Although this has often been the cause for consternation among many people, the practice is so prevalent, that one becomes accustomed to the constant distractions. Judy has an excellent view of Highland Street

and much of the front of the school. There are no window coverings so that anyone that passes outside Judy's office is greeted with a wave and a smile if she happens to be in. With such distractions, my next question to the office manager was, "How does anyone get anything done here?" Frances explained that this is just the way the school evolved and the open-door policy is more of an attitude that everyone embraces. She explains that the school is the hub of the community and as such must be open to all. When students, parents, or staff members want to voice a concern, they usually go directly to Judy. Of course, Frances's management and listening skills play interference many times. When faculty have concerns, the individual concern is usually shared with the planning team and then the team approaches Judy. However, faculty members know that they can speak to Judy individually at any time.

Classified Staff Voice

"I am a noon supervisor here (Pio Pico) and at Lowell," Dolores Villa states proudly. Not quite sure that I know what she's talking about, she points to Lowell Elementary School which is adjacent to Pio Pico. "But here at Pio Pico, it is the best!" I ask her why she believes this and she describes the *cariño* [3] that la directora Magsaysay has for the students. "Pero no sólo para los estudiantes, sino para toda la comunidad. I am home here."[4] Proudly showing off the English she has learned in her evening class, she switches back and forth between Spanish and English passionately describing the richness of Pio Pico. Following her out to the playground, I ask her about her noon supervisor duties. We weave in and out of a sea of little brown bodies running, jumping, laughing, screaming. Many of the children wave to Mrs. Villa or quickly come by and tap her as if to reassure her of their presence. She stops and waves her arm in the air. "We are like playground principals. La Señora Magsaysay comparte con nosotros la responsabilidad de asegurar que cada niño en la escuela esta seguro."[5] I can tell that Mrs. Villa takes this duty very

[3] An indescribable feeling of love/affection.
[4] "Not just for the students, but for the entire community."
[5] "Mrs. Magsaysay shares with us the responsibility for insuring that each child in the school is safe."

seriously and she is proud of her community. "I've lived in Santa Ana for 14 years and this is the best I've ever seen it."

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"You know when I first started working with Judy, she used to make me so nervous." explained Frances, the office manager. "Why?" I asked. "Well, when we first started to get to know each other, she used to call me in her office and she would just sit there and stare at me." Frances, imitating Judy, continued, "You know, her eyes get so intense, and her attention is like just totally focused on you and she would say, 'Frances, tell me all about yourself. I want to know all about you and your family.' And I kept thinking, 'Yeah, right...why?'" "But you know," Frances continued, "she really does care and she's always asking me how I am, what's going on, how I feel, how my sister is..." I interrupted, "But Judy is biased toward you Frances! How about the other classified staff. Do they think they have voice?" "Let me put it this way..." Frances replied. "Every year we have two celebrations; the end-of-the-year party and the Christmas party, and if the custodian wants to have either party at his house, that's where it is."

I was reflecting on a trip Judy, Frances and I took to San Diego to attend a conference a week earlier. We talked the typical *chisme*[6] and at some point turned to girl talk. Frances teased Judy unmercifully, yet playfully, about the time she gained a few pounds and the buttons on her dress were popping. "Ay, Judy, you know you were just trying to be sexy."

I wonder if Frances feels what the public sees - Frances worships Judy. Judy holds Frances on a pedestal and values her voice explicitly. She considers Frances to be the eyes and ears of the school. Frances is Judy's as well as the entire staff's caretaker in a number of ways and if push came to shove, Frances could run the school herself. Judy has made sure of that.

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James Boyd, the custodian who became a district electrician through a night school course of study, recited a poem about success to the entire school. He continues to visit the students and staff regularly.

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[6] gossip

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Parent Voice

The sign over Diana Malozeic's kindergarten/first grade combination classroom states "Welcome to Our House." On the day that I visited, a number of parents were reading, playing and studying with children. Diana mentioned to me that she has parents come in on a regular basis. On one counter there were bowls of grapes, carrots and dry Cheerios® as well as containers of apple juice. On tables where students worked, one could see little bowls filled with the goodies. I noticed a student drawing intently and then stopping to pop a couple of grapes in his mouth. He continued with his drawing. A small girl, Michelle, assuming I was one of the parents, asked me to read to her. She chose a book about food and it was obvious she was very familiar with it as she proceeded to make up her own story. "My favorite food" she said, "is tamales."

Again I spoke to parents who described their affection for Ms. Malozeic and much praise for her ability as a teacher, but more importantly as a person. Mrs. Dolores Villa, mother of Daniel Villa, said of the teacher, "Nos da de valer, pues así son todos los maestros y la directora."[7] She continued, "Yo pienso que como padres de habla hispana somos tan agradecidos porque muchas veces en otros lugares, los americanos no nos tratan muy bien. Pero aqúi, pues es cómo que si fueran ellos mismos igual que nosotros. Aunque no sean todos latinos o mexicanos, ellos hablan nuestra idioma, y toman en cuento nuestras costumbres. Bueno, nos hacen sentir muy especial."[8]

María Sevilla, the grandmother of Erick Sevilla poignantly described her feelings upon receiving a get-well card from her grandson's classroom wishing her well and lamenting her absence. "Cuando estaba enferma los compañeros de mijo, y la maestra y su asistente me mandaron una tarjeta diciéndome que me hechaban menos."[9] Doña Sevilla, like many other parents, has become a welcome member of the Pio Pico family. She regularly visits Erick's classroom. When asked why, she explained, "Le da orgullo cuando vengo a su salón. Además

[7] "She values us; well, they're all that way - the teachers and the principal."
[8] "I think that as Spanish-speaking parents we are very grateful because many times in other places, the Americans don't treat us very well. But here, well, it's as if they are just like us. Even though they may not all be Latinos or Mexicans, they speak our language, they embrace our customs. They make us feel very special."
[9] "When I was ill, my grandson's classmates, teacher, and the aide sent me a get-well card telling me they missed me."

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sus padres trabajan todo el día." Sheepishly, she admits, "Pues a mi me encanta porque yo no fui a la escuela y es tan lindo ver a los niños estudiando y jugando."[10]

Mrs. Sevilla added, "Tengo 20 años viviendo en esta comunidad, o sea, en Santa Ana y nosotros nos sentimos tan agusto aquí."[11] I asked why this was so. "Es la amabilidad de los maestros y también de la directora Magsaysay. Ellos nos dan voz. Nosotros, los padres, tenemos prioridad igual que los niños. Bueno, es decir que todos aquí - los estudiantes, los padres, los profesores - todos compartimos en un ambiente justo. Podemos opinar algo sin miedo de que la directora se enoje con nosotros. Ella nos tiene mucha confianza, mucho cariño y afecto."[12]

Parents are not relegated to a parent room in this community. They share equal ownership of the school, its governance, values and practices. For example, at one time the school had a family support worker. However, parents didn't feel she was doing enough. They raised this concern with Judy, and the consensus was so overwhelming that the family support worker's position was eliminated. She was replaced with three instructional assistants. Parents also sit on interview panels for new teachers.

Parent involvement and participation has been at an unprecedented level for monthly PTA and School Site Council meetings and workshops. Attendance at report card conferences is reported at 100%. Club Literario, a family reading project, Family Math, parenting and leadership programs all have high participation rates. Parents report that they feel their concerns, such as safety, are being addressed and they value being included in the processes of school and neighborhood improvement. The overriding concern shared by all parents is the safety of their children in the neighborhood. Hence, Pio Pico's curricular and schoolwide plans address this issue first and foremost.

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[10] "It makes him proud that I visit his classroom. His parents work all day and I love coming here since I never attended school; it's so beautiful to see the students studying and playing."
[11] "I've lived here in Santa Ana for 20 years and we are so comfortable here."
[12] "It's because the teachers and Mrs. Magsaysay are so nice to us. They give us voice. We, the parents, have as much priority to them as the students. Well, everyone here - the students, parents, teachers - we all share in a just environment. We can have our opinions without fear that the principal will be angry with us. She has a lot of confidence in us; a lot of love and affection for us."

Community Voice

One need only attend an "Operación Limpieza" (Operation Clean-Up) to hear and see the community's voice. The school has conducted five neighborhood operation clean-ups since 1991. In collaboration with the Santa Ana Police and Fire Departments, Neighborhood Improvement, Police Explorer Scouts, the District Building Services Department, and Home Base of Santa Ana, as well as many local merchants, the entire school community turns out in a collective effort to literally clean the neighborhood up. The activity's goal is to send a strong message throughout the community that students and families on Highland and Brook Streets do care about improving the deplorable conditions in which they live, and also to combat drug and gang activity.

Operación Limpieza has had a significant impact as a catalyst for Pio Pico's instructional program. Instructional planning teams have been established which meet weekly to develop the school's action curriculum. Together with the input from students and the community, the school selects meaningful, student-centered projects and demonstrations, such as Operación Limpieza which tackle real world problems. The school is continually critiquing, reflecting, and questioning, "What is it that we want our students to do and why?"

Community voice is strengthened by collaborative partnerships with many organizations. One such organization is The Boys' and Girls' Club of Santa Ana which sits right across the street from Pio Pico Elementary School. The general public views such clubs as centers of benevolent activity. In many cases, especially in predominantly white communities, these clubs may serve as child care centers. Unlike these centers, the Santa Ana club, also a center for youth activity, serves primarily as a safe haven from the harsh realities of an inner-city barrio. It enjoys a very close relationship with Pio Pico and the entire community. In an interview between John Brewster, the Executive Director and Tom Shively, one of my doctoral peers, Brewster stated: "...this club sits in a very unique position due to the fact that it is dead center of the highest concentration of children on the west coast. There's 26,000 kids under the age of 18 within a mile of this facility. In that same square mile are 20 of the 38 major gangs in Santa Ana. Now these are not fellows that write their names on walls. These are fellows that are run by professional criminals and often

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they involve kids in their criminal activities..." (May 21, 1997). The sad truth of this comment is reflected in a recent Los Angeles Times report (May 31, 1997) on the racketeering conviction of 12 members of the Mexican Mafia in which the powerful prison gang had tried to move in and control Southland street gangs through murder and extortion. Of the twelve defendants found guilty, one is from Santa Ana.

Judy's Voice...

can be found in her words as well as her actions. She exemplifies what McLaren refers to as critical pedagogy being the act of "investing desire in a project of the possible" (jacket summary). Her life, both personal and professional, is dedicated to ameliorating the class, race, language, and gender inequalities that the community struggles with on a daily basis. Her actions are informed by a powerful critical pedagogy, one that she is acutely aware has little value to many of her peers outside of Pio Pico. While school life for many students - especially in affluent suburban areas - is idyllic, in urban districts throughout the nation, school life is a struggle. No job description could ever describe Judy's responsibilities as principal of Pio Pico Elementary School as well as Peter McLaren does in his discourse with Henry Giroux about radical pedagogy as cultural politics (1995). He states that "School life can best be seen as a turbulent area of conflicting discourses and struggles, a terrain where classroom and streetcorner cultures collide" (p. 38).

It is within this terrain that Judy's shared voice has brought about powerful transformative change as well as envy and jealousy among some of her administrative counterparts. Her accomplishments are too numerous to present here. She was recently featured on national television during an interview with Tricia Toyota. Her receipt of two distinguished recognitions (California Wellness Foundation and the Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award - $25,000 each) signify a great respect for her work with students and families in urban communities.

It is so true that when Judy speaks, people listen. Her voice transcends the boundaries of the school office and she is able to cross borders as McLaren (1995) calls for. John Brewster, Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club captures her essence as he speaks of her associations with community organizations:

> I think that without Judy Magsaysay, they don't exist. I think that Judy is both the glue and the driving force behind them...she has been able to get a number of apartment managers to cooperate...if she has been able to cultivate some parents it is due to her personality, her charisma, her leadership...she speaks almost flawless Spanish...she truly cares about the students and families who come into her operation...she has a sense of ownership of the school...she helped create it (May 21, 1997).

Maxcy (1991) maintains that a leader "releases" the power of those he/or she is leading in order for them to practice self- as well as social-emancipation. Similarly, Starratt (1994) maintains that charismatic leaders work to "mobilize" the energies of people thereby enabling them to participate in the transformation of the environment and structures in which they find themselves. This releasing of power and mobilizing of energies is tied to the earlier comment attributed to Bode: setting intelligence free. Hence, a charismatic leader redistributes the power of the meanings and values central to human agency; people are brought closer to the center of power. Paulo Freire (1973) similarly describes this type of empowerment in his writings.

STUDENT VOICE

Out in the small open, grassy arena in the middle of the school, three students opened the presentation on graffiti by speaking simultaneously. They stood tall and serious as they recited their lines in English and then in Spanish. Pairs of students as well as individuals followed with messages regarding the problems caused by graffiti and solutions for the entire community. The presentation lasted no more than 15 minutes. At the end, we clapped crazily demonstrating our pleasure over their performance. We praised them generously, asked them questions, recorded their responses and snapped pictures. All the while, these little community advocates clamored together happily as if they were experiencing their 15 minutes of fame (Pico-Lowell Neighborhood Association Meeting, April 16, 1997).

While everyone must have their voice, it is the students' voices that are most important, yet more often silenced. McLaren (1995) persuasively advocates for the concept of student voice.

> Voice becomes a pedagogical site for asserting and interrogating spoken/unspoken interests. As a form of historical, textual, political, and gender production, student voice must be rooted in a pedagogy that allows students to speak, to appreciate, and to practice the emancipatory politics of difference. Such difference is more than a function of democratic tolerance; it is also a fundamental condition for critical dialogue and the development of forms of solidarity rooted in the principles of trust, sharing, and a commitment to improving the quality of human freedom. While we recognize that a pedagogy of voice is in itself fraught with difficulties, we believe such a pedagogy allows students to believe that to be critical is to be present in history, to make a difference with respect to the future (p. 41).

In every instance where I discerned presence of voice, I also found a deep level of trust. This was especially true of students for whom trust does not come easily in educational settings. I found several examples (too many to describe) of how students are allowed the freedom to express themselves. For example, in my visit to a bilingual kindergarten classroom, a miniature version of a Buddhist monk, Ernesto, led a group of five peers in a lesson on syllables. Holding up posters depicting letters of the alphabet to his peers, he would point to the letters and ask in an animated voice, "¿Qué letra es ésta? ¿Qué sonido hace?"[13] The classroom's state-recognized 1995 teacher-of-the-year, Nydia Hernández, stood by nodding her approval. As Ernesto's peers responded, his shaved head would bob up and down, flashing a winning smile of affirmation. Imagine the power of teaching at 5 years old!

On yet another occasion, while I was standing in the main office, a noon supervisor brought in a most handsome little boy. She told Frances, the office manager, that she wasn't sure if his haircut was acceptable for school. He strutted in obviously proud of his hairstyle. The

[13] "What letter is this? What sound does it make?"

boy's head had been shaved on both sides and around the back - a bowl cut, but the bowl was pretty small and very high up on his head. His name, *"Angel"* was shaved in on both sides of his head. As Frances marched him into Judy's office for an opinion, she playfully asked him, "Angel, why didn't you have your last name shaved in on the back - there's enough room!" He just grinned. Judy greeted him warmly and asked him how he was doing. Beneath his wide grin, I wondered if he was nervously expecting an assault on his *'do* and his dignity. Standing before Judy as she sat at her conference table with a number of people present, the seconds probably felt like hours to Angel. She pronounced with a smile on her face that since it was only his name, his new hairstyle was acceptable. "Go on now and have a good day," she said to him. He happily accepted her blessing. "Gracias, maestra."

Probably, the most resonating evidence of students' comfort and high level of confidence in expressing voice - and also the most powerful proof that Pio Pico is a democratic and ethical school as John Dewey (in Maxcy, 1995) so advocated - is the following letter written by a fifth grade female student, Alicia, to Judy Magsaysay.

> Dear Mrs. Magsaysay, Hi my name is Alicia. I am writing *unbihave*[14] of my group. We are doing a play about D.A.R.E. I am going to ask you if we can use fake guns. Please Mrs. Magsaysay, we need fake guns for our play. It's because our play is about gangsters. Or do you have another suggestion? Please let us know very soon. Thank you. P.S. in my play is Juan, John, Jazmine, Martha, Jaime, and me.

Alicia's declaration that she is writing *unbihave* of her group indicates a collective and democratic effort. Toward the end of the letter she expresses a mutual respect for the principal's opinion, and in closing reinforces the collective stance and solidarity of her group. Alicia and her peers exerted their right to request an audience with a person of authority. Furthermore, her letter made it clear that her group is open to negotiation. Such voice is a form of the aesthetic discourse of which Maxcy (1995) speaks. It is an example and reflection of what Freire, McLaren, Giroux

[14]on behalf

and other postmodern, critical theorists believe to be signs of critical cultural literacy pedagogy whereby individuals are empowered to control their own self-development and ultimately change the oppressive characteristics of the dominant society. A critical element of such self-development includes the recognition of voice as it is expressed here.

On May 14, 1997, the day after the letter was received by Judy, Alicia and her peers met with Judy in her office. A dialogue ensued whereby students, through their reflective and discursive practices with each other and with Judy, concluded that they could present their play realistically and effectively without the use of fake guns. Judy reported to me that she sensed a profound and empowering realization on the part of the students that they had problem-solved without her telling them what the solution was. Judy's role was simply that of an interested listener and nurturer of voice. Certainly, the effects of the school's constructivist approach to learning - its thinking, meaning-centered curriculum (TMCC) - is evident. This is an example of what McLaren is advocating and what we as educators need to do more of - help students reach an awareness and acceptance that they are "both the subject and object of meaning." "...I have tried to emphasize that it is the educator's task to help students critically engage the politics and ideologies which inform these questions as they begin to understand themselves as both a product and producer of meaning" (p. 15).

One of the questions I posed early on was whether the rich voices in the Pio Pico community can be sustained. As I got deeper into this fieldwork, I realized that the school district's tacit practice of rotating principals every five years, is probably weighing heavily on a lot of minds. It seems incomprehensible that the school could continue its successes and improve its recognized areas of weakness without the consistent and caring leadership it has enjoyed. The realization that Pio Pico could become a victim of the predatory culture (the field of invisibility), reinforces my resolve that we must work together to do what McLaren claims is necessary - "transform critical pedagogy into a pedagogy of hope" (p. 79). Time will tell.

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A Project of Possibility

"At issue here is linking the pedagogy of student voice to a project of possibility: students affirming and celebrating the interplay of different voices and experiences, while at the same time recognizing that such voices must be interrogated for their metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and political interests" (McLaren, 1995, p. 41).

On May 8, 1997, I accompanied Judy and Frances to San Diego to attend a symposium of California's restructuring schools sponsored by the SB 1274 Support Network. A 'protocol' team composed of faculty members had arrived the previous evening. The symposium's theme was *"Sustaining What Matters Most: Lessons Learned from Listening to Student Voice."* Its purpose was to help the restructuring schools analyze their change efforts by examining critically what students are and are not actually learning and how students experience school. A structured protocol process was used as an inquiry tool to maximize the continuous cycle of learning, action, reflection, and adjustment.

Pio Pico's protocol team presented a number of teaching, learning, and evaluation practices in which they have been and are currently involved. Participants from other restructuring schools then analyzed these practices. This process made light of the school's strengths as well as administrative, curricular and teaching practices at the school that require greater attention. Voice from outside of the school; that is, from other schools and districts, was encouraged through an open dialogue, reflection, and democratic process. The protocol process was time consuming and revealing. For Pio Pico it revealed the many opportunities students have to engage in powerful learning. Also, it clearly identified the key areas where the school needs to delve deeper. More importantly, the process revealed the project of possibility looming in the future. How this possibility is sustained and ultimately realized must become the responsibility of teacher preparation programs, higher education leaders, educators, administrators, critical theorists, and other community and cultural workers.

The foreshadowing questions posed during this fieldwork may not have been answered, but countless observations point to a certainty that voice exists at Pio Pico Elementary School. The

issue of voice, especially student voice, is significant because of the undeniable need and urgency to transform schools out of crisis and into powerful public spheres.

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